



Brochure
**Key Elements of
Sustainability Conformity
Assessment Schemes**

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INTRODUCTION

The global demand for conformity assessment schemes (CAS) in the field of sustainability has increased significantly in recent years and it is essential to ensure that these schemes are credible and robust, avoiding the pitfalls of greenwashing. Historically, and even more so in today's world, sustainability CAS play a crucial role in driving positive social, environmental and economic impacts. This document is a collaborative effort of IAF and ISEAL and explores the necessary elements a CAS in the sustainability field should meet in order to be considered credible, robust and trustworthy. This brochure builds on the foundational elements of a credible sustainability CAS, as described in [ISEAL's Credibility Principles](#).

SCOPE

Sustainability is understood to include environmental, social and economic factors. Given that sustainability targets are constantly evolving with emerging science and social norms, the evaluation of assurance schemes needs to focus on the suitability of the approach taken to ensure credible sustainability outcomes.

To guarantee transparency on the market about the aims, objectives, requirements and evaluation methods of CAS, scheme owners should consider alignment with the 10 elements described in this document.



EFFECTIVE SUSTAINABILITY CONFORMITY ASSESSMENT SCHEMES

The following ten topics cover some of the most important components of effective sustainability CAS. They represent a subset of the criteria that are drawn from ISEAL's Code of Good Practice, ISEAL's Credibility Principles, and IAF MD 25 on the Evaluation of Conformity Assessment Schemes, which are referenced at the end of this document. Alignment with these elements should not infer conformance with any of these three normative references.

1 Sustainability impacts

The CAS identifies and documents relevant sustainability issues and risks within its geographic and sectoral scope, and where it is well-placed to exert influence.

The CAS uses this assessment to define the scope of the scheme, the sustainability outcomes and impacts it aims to achieve, and the strategies it will employ to achieve them. Strategies are the range of approaches and activities that a scheme owner implements in pursuit of its specified sustainability outcomes.

Examples of evidence:

- Context assessment
- Documented scope, sustainability outcomes, and strategies



2 System alignment

The CAS establishes a conformity assessment system that aligns with and is appropriate to the scheme and its intended impacts, the intended audience or use of the scheme, and the types of claims and/or communications allowed by the scheme.

Examples of evidence:

- Documented justification for choice of conformity assessment system and for overall system alignment, based on the above characteristics.
- Documented validation information including a test period confirming it is capable of consistently achieving its stated sustainability objectives.
- Documented conformity assessment methodology and related requirements appropriate to the scheme and its intended impacts, the intended audience or use of the scheme, and the types of claims and/or communications allowed by the scheme.



3 Stakeholder engagement

The CAS provides stakeholders who have an interest in or could be affected by the scheme with adequate opportunities to provide input on the scheme's intended impacts and strategies, possible unintended negative effects, monitoring framework, normative requirements for the object of conformity assessment (management system, person, product, process or service), conformity assessment process and claims.

The CAS seeks to address barriers to participation and engagement faced by under-represented stakeholder groups, which includes individuals or organisations who are interested in or will be affected by the decisions or activities of the scheme but who have not yet participated. In some cases, this may include seeking formal consent for an initiative under the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

The CAS ensures that decisions on the content of the standard aim for consensus by a balanced and diverse group of stakeholders, including those that are directly affected by implementation of the scheme.

The CAS has a dispute resolution system that is open and accessible to all stakeholders and that facilitates the impartial handling and remediation of complaints and grievances about clients, implementing partners, and the scheme itself.

Examples of evidence:

- Criteria used to identify relevant stakeholder groups
- Consultation with stakeholders in the following areas:
 - > scheme's intended impacts and strategies
 - > possible unintended negative effects of
 - > scheme and plans to mitigate or avoid them
 - > monitoring & evaluation framework
 - > scheme development and revision
 - > communications & claims
- Proactive engagement with under-represented stakeholder groups
- Composition of decision-making bodies on scheme content
- Publicly available dispute resolution system and complaints mechanism



4 Regulatory compliance

The CAS ensures that the standard references compliance with applicable statutory and regulatory requirements related to sustainability, e.g. environment or human rights.

Examples of evidence:

- Standard requires compliance with applicable statutory and regulatory sustainability requirements
- Conformity assessment process requires checking consistency with applicable statutory and regulatory sustainability requirements

5 Sustainability risk management

The CAS has a risk management plan that identifies, quantifies, and manages threats to the integrity of its CAS, including managing risks of association with clients, business partners, and certification bodies in its CAS e.g., if they engage in illegal activity or business practices contrary to the scheme's intended sustainability impacts.

Examples of evidence:

- Policy of association or equivalent due diligence risk management tool

6 Competency

The CAS ensures that its personnel are competent in the sustainability issues covered by the scheme. In addition, the CAS has defined sustainability competency requirements for key personnel involved through its partnering conformity assessment bodies (CABs) and accreditation bodies (ABs).

Examples of evidence:

- Defined policies and procedures for sustainability competency of scheme personnel
- Defined CAS sustainability competency requirements for CAB/AB conformity assessment personnel

7 Monitoring and Evaluation

The CAS carries out monitoring and evaluation activities that aim to cover the full scope of its work and that generate accurate findings on client and scheme sustainability impacts and continuous improvement, scheme effectiveness and unintended negative effects.

The CAS has data management systems in place to effectively collect, store, analyse and share data and procedures to maintain the integrity and confidentiality of sensitive or personal data. The CAS and the AB share data about the performance of the CAB with the goal of measuring and improving scheme effectiveness.

Examples of evidence:

- Monitoring and evaluation strategy, documenting the processes and activities for collecting and analysing data and information to provide the scheme and its stakeholders with insight on progress and performance
- Data management procedures, including for data protection and privacy
- Evaluation reports or data about sustainability performance, scheme effectiveness, and unintended negative effects

8 Truthfulness

The scheme owner ensures that its claims and/or communications about the scheme and the claims and/or communications it allows clients to make are clear, relevant and accurate. Claims and/or communications are substantiated by being consistent with the scope and intended impacts of the scheme, the content of the standard, the conformity assessment systems and any sustainability performance data or evidence.

Examples of evidence:

- Conformity assessment documentation to be gathered and maintained by the CAB to confirm conformity with the sustainability objectives of the scheme
- Claims and/or communication management policies and procedures including allowed claims and/or communications
- Documentation of how allowed claims and/or communications are consistent with scope, intended impacts, standard requirements, conformity assessment model and sustainability performance data
- Claims, communications and/or logo licensing agreements



9 Learning and improvement

The scheme owner uses the outputs and learning from its monitoring and evaluation activities, as well as stakeholder input and emerging trends, to inform review and improvement of its standard and scheme components, ensuring that the scheme remains fit for purpose.

Examples of evidence:

- Documented changes to standard and scheme components, with links to monitoring and evaluation outputs and recommendations

10 Transparency

The scheme owner makes the following information publicly available and easily accessible:

- > the scheme scope, intended sustainability outcomes and impacts, and strategies for achieving them (1. Sustainability Impacts)
- > rationale for the choice of conformity assessment model and how it aligns with the scope of the scheme and its intended impacts, the intended audience, and the types of claims allowed (2. System Alignment)
- > dispute resolution process and access (3. Stakeholder engagement)
- > monitoring and evaluation strategy and regular monitoring reports of findings on client and scheme sustainability performance, scheme effectiveness, and unintended negative effects (7. Monitoring and evaluation)

Examples of evidence:

- Public availability of the above information

USEFUL REFERENCES

The following documents have been considered as input for the development of this document:

- [IAF MD 25 Criteria for Evaluation of Conformity Assessment Schemes](#)
- [ISEAL Credibility Principles](#)
- [ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems](#)



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